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ABSTRACT

To appeal to a student's interest, to challenge him at his own level, and to approach him with a method that is consistent with his own style of learning, it is necessary for education to be a highly individualized experience. The increased use of individualized instruction and independent study have placed the librarian in a new role, assisting the teacher and the independent student to organize individual, multimedia learning experiences. To increase his impact as an educator, the media specialist should become acquainted with literature concerning individual learning packages and its supporting technology. A brief bibliography is included with some 60 entries concerning media and individualized instruction. (EMH)

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INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA SPECIALIST

by

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Although elements of individualized instruction are as old as education itself, its present popularity is due to its use by the military during World War II, later adoption by business and industry and gradual acceptance by the specialized professions, including education. Programmed instruction, instructional systems and instruction to accommodate differences in learning styles represent successive attempts to implement theories of individualized instruction.

Individualized instruction provides a way to plan and to implement a program for a specific student--a program based on that student's unique learning competencies and characteristics. This type of instruction is in direct contrast to traditional forms which are intended for groups of students with similar needs and abilities. Traditional instruction ignores or minimizes the needs of students who deviate from the average.

Individualized instruction is based on certain assumptions. First, learning is unique in that students vary in their readiness, willingness and aptitude for learning, as well as in their rate of learning. Second, learning styles vary, necessitating the use of different techniques of instruction and a variety of instructional materials. Next, learning requires involvement. Finally, learning must be self-instructional if it is to be economically and operationally feasible.

Current forms of individualized instruction display similar characteristics. Each student helps to establish his own objectives by

indicating preferences for subject, sequence and depth of inquiry. This allows him to concentrate on topics of personal interest, it enables him to provide for personal expectations and it promotes increased responsibility for learning. The student starts at his own level of achievement and proceeds at his own rate through a series of simplified learning experiences. He controls the rate of the presentation and, to some degree, its frequency and duration. Individualized instruction is especially effective with subjects such as science, health, social studies and the fine arts. A student's options are limited in subjects such as mathematics and reading because concepts must be undertaken sequentially.

In individualized instruction, the student helps select appropriate learning materials; therefore, different types of material and a quantity of each are necessary to provide options. The student is involved in choosing appropriate learning activities and, as a part of this, he is asked to specify the extent of his interaction with the teacher and with other students. The student also helps evaluate his own progress by indicating his readiness for evaluation and by identifying appropriate criteria. Decision making promotes initiative and self direction; constant and immediate feedback provides incentive for improvement.

Implementing individualized instruction requires planning and preparation. The first step is to diagnose each student's previous knowledge, aptitude, perceptual strength, interests, motivation, self discipline and learning. This diagnosis is based on teacher observation, cumulative records and group and/or teacher-made tests.

After diagnosis, the student and the teacher prescribe a program of learning experiences. This might consist of a course of study, a unit, a contract, a learning package or a series of behavioral objectives which specify student behavior, designate minimum levels of achievement and describe conditions of learning. Learning activities may be teacher-oriented or student centered; alternatives include lectures, discussions, demonstrations, field trips, gaming, role playing, simulation and research. Prescribed activities should be sequential, so the student can build on previous experience. Individualized instruction does not necessarily reduce socialization; activities may be undertaken with the teacher or as part of a group--large or small. The student should be allowed to move about freely, to communicate at will and to help others. It is important that the student understand all aspects of his program.

Joint student-teacher assessment is desirable. It should be based on comparisons with behavioral objectives rather than on comparisons with time or with other students' achievement. Attitudes, values, self-concept, capability for independent study, willingness to learn and other aspects of affective change should be considered, as well as elements of cognitive change. Interim assessment might lead to modification of the original learning program. A teacher must constantly judge student progress, maintain records and guide the student to new and appropriate experiences.

It is difficult and time-consuming to develop a learning program; therefore, it is usually desirable to adopt or to adapt the format of an existing program. Models include work-study or community-contribution programs, programmed learning, contracts and instructional packages. Work-study or community-contribution programs provide opportunities for

learning experiences in the community as well as in the school. The student and the teacher together diagnose, prescribe, implement and assess learning activities. In programmed learning, all students complete the same program; however, they start in different places and proceed at different rates. Programmed learning is highly structured, with pre-arranged objectives and activities. With contracts, the student and the teacher together diagnose student needs, establish learning objectives and assess achievement. The student alone chooses appropriate activities and resources. Instructional packages are more structured than contracts, but less so than programmed experiences. The student and the teacher diagnose the situation, establish objectives and assess achievement. The student chooses from a variety of activities and resources carefully coordinated in learning packages--each package dealing with a specific idea, skill or attitude.

Specific examples of individualized systems in public schools include the Individualized Learning Package (ILP), the Learning Activity Package (LAP), the Learning Model, the Life-Involvement Model (LIM), the Program for Learning in Accordance with Needs (PLAN), and Unit Packaging (UNIPAC). Comparable systems in higher education include those that are Audio-Tutorial (AT), the Competency-Based Package (ComPac), the Instructional Model (IM), Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI), the Individualized, Performance-Based Teacher Education Program (IPT), the Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) and the Training Package.

In traditional programs, the teacher selects and assigns basic learning materials and the media specialist, if consulted, suggests supplementary materials. In individualized instruction, the teacher and the student identify available materials and choose the most appropriate,

with the advice and assistance of the media specialist. The student, the teacher and the media specialist must operate within an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation if the selection process is to be successful.

The media specialist should assist the student and the teacher to select the most direct learning experience available. According to Jerome Bruner and his categories of learning, an enactive experience is the most direct; it is characterized by personal involvement--learning by doing. Bruner's other categories of learning include the iconic--learning by doing; and the symbolic--learning by matching a verbal or visual symbol with its mental image.

Edgar Dale illustrated Bruner's learning categories in his cone of learning. The enactive category is represented at the base of the cone by direct, contrived and dramatized experiences and by demonstrations, field trips and exhibits. Bruner's iconic category is represented at the middle of the cone by television, films, recordings, radio and pictures. The symbolic category, at the tip of the cone, includes verbal and visual symbols.

The media specialist should also help the student and the teacher consider characteristics of different types of media and to choose the most appropriate. Characteristics include cost, pacing, sequencing, group size, visual impact, motion, audio contribution, availability and need for equipment.

In addition to choosing the most direct learning experience which will communicate effectively, consideration must also be given to the student's unique learning style. Characteristics of a learning style include alertness, attention span, noise tolerance, grouping patterns,

learning environment, self-directedness, preference for media, capability for self-evaluation and mode of operation. Learning style has precedence over other considerations during the development of a learning program.

The media specialist must be ready and able to suggest appropriate titles to meet specific instructional needs. To do this, he must know the kinds and amounts of materials in the media center. He must be familiar with the approximate reading and comprehension levels of these materials and different ways in which they can be used. He must bear in mind, however, that there is not one best medium; the same material can serve several purposes.

A variety of materials, in quantity, is necessary to accommodate different learning styles. A lack of media discourages use; likewise, learning is inhibited by overexposure to one type of media. It should be noted that the media doesn't have to be expensive or specialized. The cassette tape is the workhorse of the industry.

The media specialist should help teachers keep up with new titles and with new types of media. He should provide information about new titles and opportunities for previewing them. He should prescreen materials, whenever possible, to eliminate titles which are obviously unsuitable and he should avoid fads.

The media specialist should help teachers produce needed materials when ready-made, commercial materials are not available. Teachers should also be encouraged to modify materials or to use parts, as appropriate. Materials have value only to the degree that they are used.

The media specialist must believe in individualized instruction or he will impede learning in his effort to promote conformity. He must believe that his primary responsibility is guidance--matching media, the

student and the learning experience. If he is to be actively involved in the learning process and if he is to share the responsibility for learning, he must also be prepared to share the accountability.

In conclusion, a media program should be learner-centered. It should be based on the curriculum, it should be service oriented, it should be adequately staffed, and it should be well-stocked. It should be able to support every reading, viewing and listening activity undertaken as a part of the curriculum.

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